

Composition for Protecting Work Surfaces from Contamination

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to electrically charged plastic sheets, and more particularly, to a self-adhering material for protecting surfaces from contamination.

Background of the Invention

10 In environments in which hazard materials such as organic solvents and radioactive materials are used, workbenches and the like are often covered with an absorbent disposable material to prevent the contamination of the workbench in the event of a spill. Protective materials that consist of an absorbent layer with a plastic backing to prevent liquid from reaching the underlying surface are well known in the art. Such materials are sold in rolls and are cut to the correct size at the laboratory. The material is then secured to the workbench with tape to prevent the material from slipping. After the material has served its purpose, the material is removed by peeling off the tape, and the material is discarded in the appropriate trash container.

15 This solution to the contamination problem has two problems. First, the time needed to secure the protective material to the workbench is significant and requires the installer to have a large supply of masking tape or the like. Second, if excessive liquid is released on the protective material, the absorbent layer becomes saturated, and the excess liquid can seep off of the sides of the material that are nearest to the saturated portion of the sheet before the
20 operator can contain the spill and replace the protective layer.

25 Broadly, it is the object of the present invention to provide an improved protective material that can be applied to workbenches and the like.

30 It is a further object of the present invention to provide a protective material that is self-adhering, and hence, does not require tape or other adhesives.

It is a still further object of the present invention to provide a protective material that is resistant to seepage from the edges.

These and other objects of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled

- 5 in the art from the following detailed description of the invention and the accompanying drawings.

Summary of the Invention

10 The present invention is a protective covering constructed from an electrostatically charged sheet having a top and bottom surface and an absorbent layer. The absorbent layer has top and bottom surfaces, the bottom surface of the absorbent layer being bonded to the top surface of the electrostatically charged sheet. The absorbent layer is divided into a plurality of cells for containing liquid spilled on the absorbent layer. The absorbent layer can be constructed from paper, open cell foam, a fibrous mat, or any other absorbent material. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the cells are constructed by providing hydrophobic barriers in the absorbent layer. The barriers can be constructed from paraffin, plastic, or any other material that can penetrate the absorbent layer. In one embodiment of the present invention, a hydrophobic layer is bonded to the top surface of the absorbent layer. The hydrophobic layer has a plurality of pores that allow liquid spilled on the hydrophobic layer to penetrate the hydrophobic layer and be absorbed by the absorbent layer.

Brief Description of the Drawings

25 Figure 1 is a prospective view of a portion of a protective sheet 10 according to the present invention.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of another embodiment 20 of the present invention in which the absorbent layer may be covered with a hydrophobic plastic layer that includes
30 pores.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The present invention may be more easily understood with reference to Figure 1,
5 which is a prospective view of a portion of a protective sheet 10 according to the present
invention. The present invention utilizes a sheet 11 of electrically charged material that is
bonded to a layer 12 of absorbent material. The electrically charged material is preferably a
plastic that acts both as a moisture barrier and a means for securing the protective sheet to the
work bench through electrostatic adhesion. The layer of absorbent material is preferably
10 divided into cells 14 by impregnating the material with a barrier material 13 in an appropriate
pattern. The barriers prevent liquid trapped in a cell from seeping out of the cell, and hence,
solve one of the problems discussed above.

The barriers can be constructed from any hydrophobic material that can be introduced
into the absorbent material. For example, paraffin can be applied at an elevated temperature
to introduce wax barriers. Similarly, varnish or other hydrophobic material can be introduced
in an appropriate solvent which is then evaporated.

The electrostatically charged sheet is preferably a plastic such as a polyester,
polycarbonate, or polypropylene. Plastic sheets of these materials can be charged by placing
the sheets in an electric field, which is typically 10,000 volts/cm. Methods for charging such
sheets are well known to the art, and hence, will not be discussed in detail here. The sheets
may be heated during the charging process to increase the remnant electric field. In the
preferred embodiment of the present invention, a polyester film having a thickness between
25 0.001 inches and 0.01 inches is passed between rollers and subjected to an electric field and
corona discharge to charge the film. This film is then attached to the absorbent layer.
However, embodiments in which the film is attached to the absorbent layer before being
subjected to the electric field and corona discharge can also be practiced.

30 The absorbent layer is preferably constructed from paper that has been impregnated
with a hydrophobic material such as paraffin. When placed in contact with the plastic sheet,
the stripped paper can be attached by applying an adhesive or by heating the two layers while

pressing the layers together such that the hydrophobic material melts and acts as an adhesive. The thickness of the paper will depend on the anticipated liquid loading and the absorbency of the paper. Paper compositions such as used in paper towels are suitable for most applications.

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The absorbent layer can also be constructed from an open cell foam material or other absorbent material. For example, thin sheets of plastic foam with an open cell structure can be used to provide a high-absorbency material. The plastic foams that can also be charged electrically can also be advantageously utilized. Such foams will retain material 10 electrostatically after the solution in which the material was dissolved has evaporated from the absorbent layer, and thus, prevent the remaining material from being lost as "dust".

Similarly, the absorbent layer can be constructed from a fibrous mat such as used in air filters. If the fibers are formed from a plastic that can be charged, the mat can also be charged. Such electrostatically charged mats are well known in the air filter arts, and hence, will not be discussed further here.

Refer now to Figure 2, which is a perspective view of another embodiment 20 of the present invention in which the absorbent layer may be covered with a hydrophobic plastic layer 21 that includes pores 22. The pores allow a liquid spilled on layer 21 to pass through to the absorbent material while leaving the surface of the protective sheet dry. Materials such as those used in disposable diapers may be utilized for the top layer.

Various modifications to the present invention will become apparent to those skilled 25 in the art from the foregoing description and accompanying drawings. Accordingly, the present invention is to be limited solely by the scope of the following claims.